



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

MAR 25 2011

In Refer Reply To:
FWS/F4/R4/Area II

Mr. Pete Edwards
President
River Ranch Property Owners Association
18550 Circle 630 East
Lake Wales, Florida 33898

Dear Mr. Edwards:

The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) would like to thank you and the members of the River Ranch Property Owners Association (POA) for your interest in the proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. As you are aware, we held several public meetings and another face to face meeting with your organization to listen to the comments, concerns, and interest that the public and the River Ranch POA had with the proposal. Public comments and concerns that have been received on the proposal are being addressed during the next steps of the planning process.

Upon further evaluation, we have determined that the River Ranch properties will no longer be included in the boundary of the proposed project area. This is based on our commitment to only work with willing sellers and from the input we have received to date, it is apparent that the majority of landowners within the River Ranch area would not be willing sellers. The Service also recognizes the importance of the River Ranch area as an area of high conservation value, and the important role that the POA has in managing and maintaining the area.

We look forward to continued discussions and the opportunity to build a working conservation relationship with the POA. We do see the opportunity to work collaboratively on conservation projects through landowner assistance programs such as the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program which offers assistance to landowners on conservation planning and habitat management activities.

Sincerely yours,

Cynthia K. Dohner
Regional Director